School Psychology Guidelines

Student Services

NOVA SCOTIA
Education

School Psychology Guidelines

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School Psychology Guidelines

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Preface

The profession of school psychology has been transforming, with a move away from the 1970s traditional "refer, test, and place" model to a broader service delivery model (Cole and Siegel 2003). This "school psychology paradigm shift" has made way for an expanded role for school psychologists, including the delivery of services such as consultation, counselling, intervention, prevention, and in-servicing, as well as the traditional assessment role (Sheridan and Gutkin 2000). A study in the early 1980s found that school psychologists in Nova Scotia spent, on average, one-third of their time on activities related to psycho-educational assessment (Thompson 1983). This study concluded that the role of school psychologists in Eastern Canada was less "testing-focussed" than in the United States, and that school psychologists in Nova Scotia spent more time in consultation and intervention activities in comparison to their colleagues in other countries, such as the United States.

Over the past two decades there has been substantial change in the time dedicated to psycho-educational assessments by school psychologists (Corkum, Dorey, and French 2007). However, there was also evidence of diversity in the roles of school psychologists in Nova Scotia, with the provision of services such as consultation, behavioural assessments, and individual counselling. School psychologists also indicated delivering additional services such as in-servicing, consultation with mental health professionals, prevention, supervision, and group counselling.

The school psychologist is an integral and important part of a comprehensive model of student services. The school psychologist serves the school board by engaging in planning, developing, and implementing individual and group programs to address behavioural, emotional, and academic concerns. Collaborative consultation with teachers and mental health professionals enables the school psychologist to participate in appropriate programming for

students. School psychologists are valuable resources for school boards, teachers, and parents and guardians in providing in-service education on a variety of school-related issues, such as behaviour management and parenting skills. They also consult with community agencies that support children and youth, such as medical practitioners, mental health professionals, and support groups.

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Introduction

Purpose

As part of the Nova Scotia Department of Education Student Services Series, *School Psychology Guidelines* is intended to provide guidance to school boards on the role of school psychologists and their expected competencies and to assist school boards in the development of related policy and procedures. It is also intended to articulate the role of school psychologists within the framework of the collaborative program planning process.

Context

These guidelines reflect the philosophy, legislation, goals, policies, and best practices embodied in the *Education Act* and the regulations under the act, the *Public School Programs* document, the *Special Education Policy*, the *Psychologists Act*, and supporting documents.

Education Act and Regulations under the Act

The *Education Act* outlines the roles and primary responsibilities of school boards (Section 64), teachers (Section 26), Students (Section 24), Administrators (Section 38), and parents and guardians (Section 25) concerning the education of all students, including those with special needs. Registered psychologists and candidate register psychologists operate under the legal framework of this act.

Public School Programs

The primary mandate of the public school system in Nova Scotia, as defined in *Public School Programs*, is to provide education programs and services for students to enable them to develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.

The following seven principles of learning, upon which the public school program is based, set a clear direction for teachers, administrators, and professional support staff for the educational experiences they plan for their students.

- Learning is a process of actively constructing knowledge.
- Students construct knowledge and make it meaningful in terms of their prior knowledge and experiences.
- Learning is enhanced when it takes place in a social and collaborative environment.
- Students need to continue to view learning as an integrated whole.
- Learners must see themselves as capable and successful.
- Learners have different ways of knowing and representing knowledge.
- Reflection is an integral part of learning.

Public School Programs identifies six areas of learning known as essential graduation learnings through which public education goals can best be attained. These learning areas, which bridge subject and specific curriculum boundaries, are

- aesthetic expression
- citizenship
- communication
- personal development
- problem solving
- technological competence

Public School Programs states that a comprehensive education must offer a balanced program of studies that includes opportunities to explore the cultural, aesthetic, social, intellectual, physical, vocational, and moral aspects of society. School psychologists can play a major role in helping the school system work towards these outcomes. (Nova Scotia Department of Education 2003.)

Special Education Policy (2008)

Under the *Special Education Policy*, each school board is responsible for establishing a process of identification, assessment, program planning, and evaluation for students with special needs. The program planning process (detailed in Policy 2.2 of the *Special Education Policy*), carried out by school-level program planning teams, provides a vehicle for building collaborative support networks designed to address a student's identified educational needs. School psychologists and the programming and services they provide are important components of the program planning process for students with special needs, and they can be a major component of the resulting support networks developed for individual students.

Psychologists Act (S.N.S. 2000, c. 32)

The *Psychologists Act* was passed in 2000 and proclaimed in June 2002. It outlines the qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of registered psychologists and candidate register psychologists. It addresses issues such as client records and the discipline process regarding those registered under the act. Registered psychologists and candidate register psychologists operate under the legal framework of this act. (See www.nsbep.org.)

Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, Third Edition (Canadian Psychological Association 2000)

Psychologists and candidate register psychologists in Nova Scotia adhere to the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*. Other important documents to be consulted include the *Code of Ethics of the Canadian Association of School Psychologists* (adopted from CPA), as well as the *Standards for Professional Practice in School Psychology*. (For more information, refer to www.cpa.ca/ethics2000.html.)

Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) Code of Ethics

All members of the NSTU holding a Nova Scotia teacher's certificate must adhere to the *Nova Scotia Teachers Union Code of Ethics*. This code of ethics is a guide to members in maintaining, at all times, the high standards of their profession.

Certification of School Psychologists

All psychologists practising in Nova Scotia schools require a teacher's certificate as issued by the Nova Scotia Department of Education.
In Nova Scotia, individuals must be registered by the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology in order to represent themselves as psychologists. It is the responsibility of each school psychologist to inform their employer of any changes in teaching certification and/or registration status with the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

Qualifications of School Psychologists

Registration by the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology requires that an individual has an approved graduate degree in psychology from a recognized university program and fulfils the required supervised work experience and examinations. Individuals who are eligible for registration in Nova Scotia and are being supervised by a registered psychologist during their candidacy period are referred to as a "Psychologist (Candidate Register)." When parent or guardian consent is obtained for an assessment by a candidate register psychologist, the parent(s) and guardian(s) must be informed that a Nova Scotia Board of Examiner Supervisor will have access to the student and the student's school records in supervising the candidate register psychologist. (For more information, refer to www.nsbep.org.)

Competencies of School Psychologists

The *Mutual Recognition Agreement of the Regulatory Bodies for Professional Psychologists in Canada* (Canadian Psychological Association 2001) was signed in Quebec City on June 24, 2001. This agreement outlines what the Canadian Psychological Association considers to be the core competencies of professional psychologists. While they are clinically based competencies, they may serve as a broad reference for the practice of psychology in school settings. (For more information, refer to www.cpa.ca/documents/MRA.pdf.)

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the school psychologist may include, but are not limited to, the following[1]:

Prevention

- increase awareness of mental health stressors and strategies
- teach parents and guardians and educators skills to address behavioural concerns
- collaborate with school staff and community agencies to provide services directed at improving physical and mental health and well-being
- assist in the development of programs to enhance positive and effective learning environments in schools
- promote the understanding and appreciation of diversity (cultural, learning, gender, sexuality, socio-economic, race, religion, etc.) within the school community
- participate on school-level committees
- participate on board/provincial committees

1. Some material in this section has been adapted from "School Psychologists: Providing Mental Health Services to Improve the Lives and Learning of Children and Youth," National Association of School Psychologists. www.nasponline.org/advocacy/mhbrochure.aspx.

Consultation

- work collaboratively with teachers, administrators, parent(s) and guardian(s), and other professionals to find effective solutions to learning and behaviour problems
- provide parent(s) and guardian(s) with specific information about their children's development and individual learner profiles
- consult with and participate on program planning teams
- consult with schools regarding classroom management strategies
- assist parents and guardians and educators in the interpretation of psychological reports
- help others understand child development and how it affects learning and behaviour
- provide individual and group information sessions to parent(s) and guardian(s) on a variety of topics

Assessment

- review the pre-referral strategies that have been used with the child
- conduct comprehensive assessments that identify the strengths and challenges of a child in such areas as behaviour, learning, and social-emotional development, which may include the following:
  - observation across a variety of settings (e.g., classroom, gym, music room)
  - collection of relevant data on case history
  - informal assessments
  - interpretation of data
  - formation of specific recommendations for programming and intervention
  - communication of outcomes of assessment process, including (a) feedback session at school site with parent(s) and guardian(s) and school personnel and, (b) preparation and dissemination of a written report that interprets and summarizes assessment results and includes recommendations
- contribute to the development of individual learner profiles of strengths and challenges through the assessment of cognitive ability, academic achievement, social skills, and other key measures of students' holistic functioning within the school environment (see Appendix A: Key Steps in the Assessment Process)

- diagnose specific learning disabilities, as appropriate
- provide written assessment reports consistent with components of Written School Psychologist Reports, outlined on p. 12

Intervention

- contribute to program planning for individual students
- develop strategies/interventions for classroom management, behavioural support, and programming
- support school personnel and parent(s) and guardian(s) in the implementation of programming recommendations
- work directly with children and their families to help resolve problems in social-emotional and learning outcomes
- provide training in social skills and anger management
- provide counselling to address barriers to school success
- assist school communities in responding to crises, such as death, illness, or community trauma
- evaluate the effectiveness of academic and behaviour management programming, including components in the individual program plan

Professional Development and Research

- provide individual and group information sessions to school personnel on a variety of topics
- share areas of expertise with other school psychologists and professional groups
- conduct and/or collaborate on research
- be knowledgeable about current psychological and educational research and how it applies to educational practices

School Psychology Services

In Nova Scotia, psychologists working in schools are employed by the school board in that region. The minimum recommended ratio of school psychologists to students in Nova Scotia is 1:2500 (*Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee*, Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2001, p. 22).

The focus of school psychology services is to provide support for educational planning and programming. Services provided may be direct or indirect, depending on identified needs and the model of service delivery in the school board. Direct services may include, but are not limited to, assessment, counselling, and behavioural intervention. Indirect services may include, but are not limited to, prevention initiatives, consultation, and professional development activities. The policies and procedures that outline access to school psychology services are developed and implemented at the school board level.

Service delivery models for school psychology services in Nova Scotia vary across school boards depending on a variety of factors, including geographical area, number of school psychologists, and administrative structure.

The types of services provided by a school psychologist will also depend on a number of factors, including specific areas of training, experience, and the needs and priorities established by the school board and schools served by the school psychologist. School priorities will be determined by each school according to board policy/procedures and the *Special Education Policy* (Policy 2.2).

School Psychologists and the Program Planning Process

Programming and services provided by school psychologists are intended to support students in achieving the learning outcomes of the public school programs curriculum. For students with an individual program plan, this may be accomplished through participation in program planning.

The information below outlines the potential role that school psychologists may have in the program planning process as outlined in Policy 2.2 of the *Special Education Policy*. For more information, see www.EDnet.ns.ca/pdfdocs/studentsvcs/specialed/speceng.pdf.

Process Stage	Role: The school psychologist may ...
Screening and Identification	Informally consult with schools about learning or behavioural issues
Exploration of Instructional Strategies	Informally consult, as requested, with teachers about possible teaching and behavioural strategies
Referral for Program Planning Team	Provide support for the referrals and information gathering process
Program Planning Team Meetings	If further information is needed, provide consultation and/or assessment services
Program Plan Development	As a member of the school team, • share information relevant to the student's learning/behaviour profile • assist in the selection and/or development of materials and resources appropriate to the challenges of the student • assist in the selection of instructional strategies to meet student challenges
Implementation of Program Plan	• Implement behavioural and/or social interventions specified in the IPP • provide ongoing consultation as a member of the program planning team
Monitoring	Assist in evaluating the behavioural and/or social outcomes outlined in the IPP as designated
Reviewing of Program Plan	When designated as responsible in the IPP, report on student progress in relation to the evaluation of behavioural and/or social outcomes

As outlined in Policy 2.2 of the *Special Education Policy*, before a student is referred to a school psychologist according to board practice, it is expected that a number of pre-referral strategies have been attempted and documented at the school level. If it is determined that a referral is necessary, such a referral will be made according to board procedure. (See Appendix D for sample referral form.)

Level of Tests

There are two broad categories of assessment, both requiring specific qualifications to administer. These two categories are informal assessment and formal assessment. (See Policy 2.5 and Appendix A of the *Special Education Policy*.) For the purpose of this document, tests have been divided into three levels: A, B, and C. (See Appendix B for detailed information, including examples of tests in each of the levels, administration of tests, access, and consent.) A specific responsibility of school psychologists is the ethical requirement to protect test security and to ensure that access to psychological tests is restricted to qualified test administrators.

Written School Psychologist Reports

School psychologists will ensure that written assessment reports and feedback sessions are completed in a timely manner, according to board guidelines. The school psychologist will meet with the parent(s) and guardian(s), the student (if appropriate), and the program planning team to explain the nature of the assessment and the results. A copy of the written report will be provided to the parent(s) and guardian(s) upon request, to the student (if appropriate), and to the school the child is presently attending to be placed in the student's confidential record.

While the format of written reports may differ amongst psychologists, there are major categories that should be included in every report. These include the following:

- student personal information (e.g., date of birth, grade, provincial student number)
- dates of assessment
- reason(s) for referral
- assessment instruments and procedures used
- relevant background information
- school history (review of existing student records)
- previous assessment results
- interview(s) with teachers
- interview(s) with parent(s) and guardian(s)
- interview with student
- behaviour during testing
- test/assessment results
- student strengths and challenges
- diagnosis of a specific learning disability, if appropriate
- summary/interpretation of information
- recommendations
- referral for further assessment of indicators of other cognitive or mental disorders, if appropriate

NOTE

Written reports will not contain actual intelligence scores. Rather, scores will be explained in terms of percentiles, ranges, and/or categories. For more information See Appendix F, Test Scores: A Guide to Understanding and Using Test Results, and Appendix G, Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education.

Storage and Release of Psychological Reports

A copy of the report generated from the assessment must be securely stored in the student confidential record with access limited to qualified personnel as described in the *Student Records Policy* (Nova Scotia Department of Education 2006). The original report and all protocols must be stored in a secure manner at the board level, according to board policies and procedures. According to the provincial *Student Records Policy*, written consent is required from parent(s) and guardian(s) in order to release student records (see Appendix C for a sample form.)

Conflict of Interest

School psychologists are expected to adhere to school board policies concerning conflict of interest and private practice as well as those stipulated by the National Association of School Psychologist's *Professional Conduct Manual: Principals for Professional Ethics: Guidelines for the Provision of School Psychological Services* (2000), the Canadian Psychological Association's *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (2000), and the Canadian Association of School Psychologist's, *Standards for Professional Practice in School Psychology* (2001).

Appendices

Appendix A: Key Steps in the Assessment Process

Pre-assessment

- ☐ The teacher has explored and documented a variety of strategies; however, further intervention is needed.
- ☐ The teacher has been in contact with parent(s)/guardian(s).
- ☐ School personnel have recommended a referral for school psychology assessment.
- ☐ Cumulative and confidential records have been reviewed.
- ☐ School-based assessment, if appropriate, has been completed.
- ☐ Informal consultation with school psychologist has been recommended.
- ☐ Referral form has been completed.
- ☐ Informed, written consent form has been signed by parent(s)/guardian(s).
- ☐ Pertinent information has been gathered from all sources (see sample form in Appendix C, Authorization to Obtain and/or Release Student Records).

Assessment

- ☐ The school psychologist chooses appropriate procedures to address the referral question (e.g., observation, behavioural checklists, interviews, formal standardized testing including intellectual, academic, memory, and perceptual skills.)
- ☐ The school psychologist meets with the student in a suitable place at the student's school and completes the assessment.

Post-assessment

- ☐ The school psychologist evaluates the data, writes a report with recommendations, and provides written and oral feedback to staff and parent(s)/guardian(s) in a timely manner.
- ☐ Recommendations are considered in programming for the student.

Appendix B: Test Information

This information does not apply to classroom and provincial assessments administered as a part of the provincial public school program, research studies, and/or provincially administered assessments.

Level A Tests

These are tests that can be adequately administered, scored, and interpreted with the aid of the manual, a familiarity with the client population, and a general knowledge of measurement principles.

Level B Tests

These are tests that require specific training for administration, scoring, and interpretation. These tests are more complex than Level A tests. Level B tests require formal training in the areas of statistics and measurement. Level B are standardized tests of academic achievement.

Level C Tests

These tests require advanced training, generally restricted to registered or candidate register psychologists in Nova Scotia.

Description	Level A Tests	Level B Tests	Level C Tests
Utilization of tests at the discretion of the school boards (tests are not limited to the examples provided in this section)	• Alberta, Brigance	• Keymath, Woodcock Johnson Achievement test, Woodcock Reading Mastery test—these do not include measures of intelligence Note: Although the Weschler Individual Achievement Test—Second Edition (WIAT—II) is a Level B test, some Nova Scotia public school boards may limit its use to psychologists only. This is because it is co-normed for use with the Weschler Intelligence Scales and assists in the diagnosis of learning disabilities.	• Intelligence Scales (e.g., Weschler Intelligence Scales, Woodcock Johnson Intelligence test, Stanford-Binet intelligence test) • Personality measures

Description	Level A Tests	Level B Tests	Level C Tests
Training and Administration Requirements	• valid Nova Scotia Teacher's Certificate • currently working within the Nova Scotia public school system (as a teacher and/or consultant) • familiarity with the specific instrument used • knowledge about topic of test • ability to follow administration procedures set out in manual	• valid Nova Scotia Teacher's Certificate • currently working within the Nova Scotia public school system (as a teacher and/or consultant) • a minimum of a master's degree or equivalent, which includes supervised experience/practicum and course work in 1. the test principles of reliability, validity, test construction, norm groups, and types of scores 2. administration 3. interpretation or graduate course work in 1. test principles such as reliability, validity, test construction, norm groups, and types of scores 2. administration 3. interpretation as determined by the school board Student Services Co-ordinator	• valid Nova Scotia Teacher's Certificate • currently working within the Nova Scotia public school system as a school psychologist or educational assessor • a minimum of a master's degree or equivalent, which includes supervised experience/practicum and course work in 1. the test principles of reliability, validity, test construction, norm groups, and types of scores 2. administration 3. interpretation or graduate course work in 1. test principles such as reliability, validity, test construction, norm groups, and types of scores 2. administration 3. interpretation as determined by the school board Student Services Co-ordinator • fulfilment of any additional training requirements as stipulated by the test publisher and/or with school board
Purchaser Eligibility	• The test must be ordered by the school, school board, or the person directly responsible for administration.	• These tests are available to individuals meeting the above training standards and to agencies where qualified test users are employed.	• These tests are restricted to individuals who meet the training requirements described above.

Description	Level A Tests	Level B Tests	Level C Tests
Storage and Access • Protocols and reports generated from criterion-referenced tests (e.g., Brigance) must be securely stored according to board direction. Access to reports is limited to qualified personnel described in the *Student Records Policy* (2006).	• Any reports generated from these tests must be securely stored in the student confidential record with access limited to qualified personnel described in the *Student Records Policy* (2006).	• All protocols are to be stored, at school level, in a secure manner according to board policy.	• A copy of the report generated from tests must be securely stored in the student confidential record, with access limited to qualified personnel as described in the *Student Records Policy* (2006). The original report and associated protocols must be stored in a secure manner, according to board policies and procedures.
Consent	• No consent required for curriculum/classroom-based assessment related to the provincial public school program (e.g., observation survey, Active Young Readers assessments).	• Informed written consent from parent(s)/guardian(s) must be received prior to administration of Level B tests, described in Policy 2.4 of the *Special Education Policy*.	• Informed written consent from parent(s)/guardian(s) must be received prior to administration of Level C tests, described in Policy 2.4 of the *Special Education Policy*.

Appendix C: Sample Authorization Form

Authorization to Obtain and/or Release Student Records

Student: _____ Date of birth (d/m/y): _____

School: _____ Provincial student number: _____

Name of person giving consent: _____

Relationship to student: _____

Please check all that apply:

☐ I hereby give permission for release of the assessment report to be sent to the following individual(s):

_____

☐ I hereby give permission for _____ to contact the following individual(s) to discuss issues and exchange information regarding the student.

_____ _____

☐ I hereby give permission for _____ to obtain information, records, and reports relevant to the student from the following individual(s)/agency(ies):

_____

Specific instructions: _____

_____

_____

I understand that the above-noted permission is granted for a period not to exceed 12 months from the date of signature. I also understand I can withdraw the permission at any time.

_____ _____

Signature of Person Giving Consent Date

Appendix D: Sample Referral Form

Referral for School Psychological Services

School: _____ Date: _____

Student (legal name): _____ Date of birth (d/m/y): _____

Provincial student number: _____ Grade: _____

Parent(s)/guardian(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

_____

Nature of the concern(s):

- ☐ experiencing difficulty with meeting grade-level outcomes
- ☐ behavioural difficulties
- ☐ emotional/social difficulties
- ☐ re-assessment
- ☐ other: _____

Reason for referral by Program Planning Team (main concern to be addressed):

_____

_____

_____

Previous testing and/or assessments (instruments and date):

_____

_____

_____

Date of last hearing/vision checks: hearing: _____ vision: _____

Other concerns: _____

Medications: _____

Briefly outline the student's performance (i.e., class tests, assignments, project work) and work habits.

_____

_____

_____

What classroom/school/program interventions have been tried to date?

- ☐ Adaptations (please attach current adaptation to this document)
- ☐ Individual Program Plan (IPP) (please attach current IPP to this document)
- ☐ Reading Recovery (outcome status: ☐ successfully discontinued or ☐ referred)
- ☐ Resource Support / Learning Centre support (please attach explanation including length of time, main focus, etc.)
- ☐ Specialist Services:
  - ☐ speech language pathologist ☐ guidance counsellor
  - ☐ behavioural specialist ☐ alternative program
  - ☐ other: _____
- ☐ Classroom strategies (please list):

_____

_____

- ☐ Outside agencies (specify): _____
- ☐ Other, please explain: _____

_____

_____

Is attendance a factor? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

If yes, explain: _____

_____

_____

_____

Describe relationships with peers:

_____

_____

_____

Describe relationships with teachers:

_____

_____

_____

Describe behaviours at school (e.g., socially isolated, active, restless):

_____

_____

_____

Strengths (academic/social/behavioural)	Challenges (academic/social/behavioural)

Additional comments: _____

_____

_____

To be completed by the Program Planning Team.

Signature of Program Planning Team Chair: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Principal: _____ Date: _____

Copies sent to: _____

Appendix E: Sample Consent Form

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Consent for School Psychological Services

School: _____ Date: _____

Student (legal name): _____ Date of birth (d/m/y): _____

Provincial student number: _____ Grade: _____

Parent(s)/guardian(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

_____

Service(s) recommended by the Program Planning Team:

- ☐ Psycho-educational Assessment
- ☐ Behavioural Consultation/Assessment
- ☐ Counselling (Group/Individual)
- ☐ Other: _____

Please see attached Descriptions of Services.

Note: It is important for you and your child to understand that participation in the above activities is voluntary; your child cannot be required to participate. You and/or your child also have the right to discontinue the process at any time. You have a right to a copy of any reports that are produced from this assessment. If you decide to allow your child to participate, information on his or her participation will become a permanent part of your child's record. If a psycho-educational assessment is conducted by a candidate register psychologist, a supervisor with the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology will have access to your child and his or her school records.

Parent(s)/guardian(s) please complete:

☐ I/we consent to (name of student) receiving the above indicated service, and I understand that specific school staff may be consulted and that information about the referral will be placed in the student's confidential record. I understand that this information will be discussed at the Program Planning Team meetings and may be used to develop a program for my child. In the case of an assessment, a written report would be placed in the student's confidential record.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

OR

☐ I/we do not consent to (name of student) receiving the above indicated service.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Psycho-educational assessment forms will not be released. Please note that your child will be seen by the school psychologist on a priority basis, not necessarily in order of referral.

Copies sent to: _____

Descriptions of Services

What is involved in a psycho-educational assessment?

An individual psycho-educational assessment is completed by a school psychologist in a one-to-one situation at the school. It will include tests, observations, and discussions with the student. Depending on the referral, the assessment may include intellectual, developmental, academic, and/or social-emotional tests and concerns. An assessment may include a review of school history, classroom observations, as well as interviews with the student, parent(s)/guardian(s), school personnel, and outside agencies such as family physicians and/or community services. Discussions with school staff and a review of all student records are involved. The parent(s)/guardian(s) will be asked to provide information about their child. Meetings with the Program Planning Team (including the parent(s)/guardian(s) and student) to review the results and clarify information will occur once the assessment is completed. The written report completed by the school psychologist is placed in the student's confidential record and is provided, upon request, to the parent(s)/guardian(s).

What is involved in counselling?

Counselling services can often help students cope with life experiences that are affecting their ability to perform to their potential. Conversations between the student and the psychologist are protected under confidentiality. However, the goal of all counselling services is to promote student well-being and healthy communication between the student and the important people in their lives. *The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association 2000) states that there are three exceptions to confidentiality. These are when disclosure is required to prevent clear and imminent danger to the client or others, when legal requirements demand that confidential material be revealed, and when a child is in need of protection. Counselling services offered at the school level are usually short term.

What is involved in a behavioural consultation/assessment?

Often, the behaviour of a student can affect their ability to perform to their potential. Many times, a referral to the school psychologist for a behavioural consultation/assessment may be needed. An assessment may include the use of tests, observations, and discussions with the student in a one-to-one situation at the school. An assessment may include a review of school history, classroom observations, as well as interviews with the student, parent(s)/guardian(s), school personnel, and outside agencies such as family physicians and/or community services. Discussions with school staff and a review of all student records are involved. The parent(s)/guardian(s) will be asked to provide information about their child. Meetings with the Program Planning Team (including the parent(s)/guardian(s) and student) to review the results and clarify information will occur once the assessment is completed. The written report completed by the school psychologist is placed in the student's confidential record and is provided, upon request, to the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Appendix F: Test Scores: A Guide to Understanding and Using Test Results

By Dawn P. Flanagan, PhD, & Lenny F. Caltabiano
St. John's University, Jamaica, New York

When a student takes either an individually or group-administered standardized test at school, the results are made available to both parents and teachers. It is important that parents and teachers understand the meaning of scores that come from standardized tests. This handout provides a description of common terms used to describe test performance. You are also encouraged to refer to handouts on Psychological Reports (Flanagan & Caltabiano) and Intellectual Assessment (Ortiz & Lella) to gain a better understanding of the evaluation process. (See "Resources").

Frequently Used Terms

The results of most psychological tests are reported using either standard scores or percentiles. Standard scores and percentiles describe how a student performed on a test compared to a representative sample of students of the same age from the general population. This comparison sample or group is called a norm group. Because educational and psychological tests do not measure abilities and traits perfectly, standard scores are usually reported with a corresponding confidence interval to account for error in measurement.

Standard Score

Most educational and psychological tests provide standard scores that are based on a scale that has a statistical mean (or average score) of 100. If a student earns a standard score that is less than 100, then that student is said to have performed below the mean, and if a student earns a standard score that is greater than 100, then that student is said to have performed above the mean. However, there is a wide range of average scores, from low average to high average, with most students earning standard scores on educational and psychological tests that fall in the range of 85–115. This is the range in which 68% of the general population performs and, therefore, is considered the normal limits, of functioning.

Classifying Standard Scores

However, the normal limits of functioning encompass three classification categories: low average (standard scores of 80–89), average (standard scores of 90–109), and high average (110–119). These classifications are used typically by school psychologists and other assessment specialists to describe a student's ability compared to same-age peers from the general population.

Subtest Scores

Many psychological tests are composed of multiple subtests that have a mean of 10, 50, or 100. Subtests are relatively short tests that measure specific abilities, such as vocabulary, general knowledge, or short-term auditory memory. Two or more subtest scores that reflect different aspects of the same broad ability (such as broad Verbal Ability) are usually combined into a composite or index score that has a mean of 100. For example, a Vocabulary subtest score, a Comprehension subtest score, and a General Information subtest score (the three subtest scores that reflect different aspects of Verbal Ability) may be combined to form a broad Verbal Comprehension Index score. Composite scores, such as IQ scores, Index scores, and Cluster scores, are more reliable and valid than individual subtest scores. Therefore, when a student's performance demonstrates relatively uniform ability across subtests that measure different aspects of the same broad ability (the Vocabulary, Comprehension, and General Information subtest scores are both average), then the most reliable and valid score is the composite score (Verbal Comprehension Index in this example). However, when a student's performance demonstrates uneven ability across subtests that measure different aspects of the same broad ability (the Vocabulary score is below average), then the Verbal Comprehension Index may not provide an accurate estimate of verbal ability. In this situation, the student's verbal ability may be best understood by looking at what each subtest measures. In sum, it is important to remember that unless performance is relatively uniform on the subtests that make up a particular broad ability domain (such as Verbal Ability), then the overall score (in this case the Verbal Comprehension Index) may be a misleading estimate.

Percentile

Standard scores may also be reported with a percentile to aid in understanding performance. A percentile indicates the percentage of individuals in the norm group that scored below a particular score. For example, a student who earned a standard score of 100 performed at the 50th percentile. This means that the student performed as well as or better than 50% of same-age peers from the general population. A standard score of 90 has a percentile rank of 25. A student who is reported to be at the 25th percentile performed as well or better than 25% of same-age peers, just as a student who is reported to be at the 75th percentile performed as well or better than 75% of students of the same age. While that standard score of 90 is below the statistical mean of 100 and is at the 25th percentile, this performance is still within the average range and generally does not indicate any need for concern.

Confidence Interval

Psychological tests do not measure ability perfectly. No matter how carefully a test is developed, it will always contain some form of error or unreliability. This error may exist for various reasons that are not always readily identifiable. In order to account for this error, standard scores are often reported with confidence intervals.

Confidence intervals represent a range of standard scores in which the student's true score is likely to fall a certain percentage of the time. Most confidence intervals are set at 95%, meaning that a student's true score is likely to fall between the upper and lower limits of the confidence interval 95 out of 100 times (or 95% of the time). For example, if a student earned a standard score of 90 with a confidence interval of +/–5, this means that the lower limit of the confidence interval is 85 (that is, 90 – 5=85) and the upper limit of confidence interval is 95 (90 + 5=95). The standard score of 90 may be reported in a psychological report as 90 +/–5 or 90 (85–95). Although the student's score on the day of the evaluation was 90 in this example, the true score may be lower or higher than 90 owing to an error associated with the method in which the ability was measured. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that there is 95% chance that the student's true performance on this test falls somewhere between 85 and 95.

Tests that are highly reliable have relatively small confidence bands associated with their scores, indicating that these tests provide the most consistent scores across time.

Example: Reporting Scores

The following statement is one that can be commonly found in a psychological report and can be used to illustrate these definitions: "Jacob obtained a standard score of 93 +/– 7 on a test of reading comprehension, which is ranked at the 33rd percentile and is classified as average." This is what that statement means: First, Jacob's observed score fell below the mean of 100. Second, Jacob did as well as or better than 33% of students his age from the general population. Third, there is a 95% chance that Jacob's true score falls somewhere between 86 and 100. Fourth, Jacob's performance is considered average relative to same-age peers from the general population.

Understanding the Assessment Report

Type of norms used. It is important to take note of the types of norms used when reading test results in a psychological or school assessment report. A student's performance on a standardized test can be compared to other students of the same age (age norms) or of the same grade (grade norms). Age norms are always used for tests of intellectual ability so that comparisons can be made to same-age peers. The use of grade norms is related to the type of test being utilized or may be dictated by certain situations. For example, grade norms may be most appropriate for achievement tests when a student has repeated a grade and to see how the student's performance compares to grade-level peers.

Use of age or grade equivalents. Age and grade equivalents are different from age and grade norms. Essentially, the age and grade equivalents are scores that indicate the typical age or grade level of students who obtain a given score. For example, if Jacob's performance on the test of reading comprehension is equal to an age equivalent of 8.7 years and a grade equivalent of 2.6, this means that his obtained raw score is equivalent to the same number of items correct that is average for all 8-year, 7-month old children included in the norm group on that particular reading comprehension test. Additionally Jacob's score is equivalent to the average reading comprehension performance of all children included in the normative sample who were in the sixth month of second grade. The age or grade equivalents do *not* mean that Jacob is functioning on an 8-year-old, mid-second grade level. Remember that Jacob's standard score of 93 is classified as average and falls within the normal range of functioning. Consequently, it is always important to make decisions and interpretations about normal functioning using standard scores, not age and grade equivalents.

Validity of scores. Reports of assessment results typically include a statement as to the validity—or accuracy—of the test scores. There are many factors that can influence a student's test performance. These factors may include, but are not limited to, behaviour during testing, the presence of distractions during testing, the student's cultural and linguistic background, and the student's physical health at the time of testing. An educational or psychological test report should indicate whether any of these factors were present and how they may have affected the results of the test, thereby compromising the validity of the findings. Typically, this information, appearing in the Behavioural Observations section of a psychological report, aids in assessing the validity and usefulness of the test findings. If the school psychologist did not observe any unusual behaviors during testing and if no other factors, internal (lack of motivation, depressed mood, fatigue) or external (loud voices outside the testing room), were believed to have had an adverse affect on test performance, then the psychologist's statement about the validity of the findings may be like this: "Overall, the current test results appear to represent a valid estimate of Jacob's cognitive and academic functioning." This statement assists the reader in determining whether the results from the psychological tests administered to the student may be used confidently to make diagnostic and educational decisions.

Summary

When parents and teachers better understand the meaning of scores from educational or psychological evaluations, they are able to better plan to meet students' needs. Additional information is available in the "Resources" below, and from the assessment professionals at your school, such as the school psychologist or counselor.

Resources

Flanagan, D., & Caltabiano, L. (2004). Psychological reports: A guide for parents and teachers. In A. Canter, L. Paige, M. Roth, I. Romero, & S. Carroll (Eds.), Helping children and home and school II: Handouts for families and educators. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Harcourt Assessment (n.d.). Some things parents should know about testing. Available: http://marketplace.psychcorp.com (see Resource Center, About Testing).

Ortiz, S., & Lella, S. (2004). Intellectual assessment and cognitive abilities: Basics for parents and educators. In A. Canter, L. Paige, M. Roth, I. Romero, & S. Carroll (Eds.), Helping children and home and school II: Handouts for families and educators. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Wright, P. D., & Wright, P. D. (2000). "Understanding tests and measurement for the parent and advocate." Available: www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/assessment/tests_measurements.html.

Websites

Harcourt Assessment—http://marketplace.psychcorp.com

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Appendix G: Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education

Prepared by the Joint Committee on Testing Practices

The Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education (***Code***) is a guide for professionals in fulfilling their obligation to provide and use tests that are fair to all test takers regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, linguistic background, or other personal characteristics. Fairness is a primary consideration in all aspects of testing. Careful standardization of tests and administration conditions helps to ensure that all test takers are given a comparable opportunity to demonstrate what they know and how they can perform in the area being tested. Fairness implies that every test taker has the opportunity to prepare for the test and is informed about the general nature and content of the test, as appropriate to the purpose of the test. Fairness also extends to the accurate reporting of individual and group test results. Fairness is not an isolated concept, but must be considered in all aspects of the testing process.

The ***Code*** applies broadly to testing in education (admissions, educational assessment, educational diagnosis, and student placement) regardless of the mode of presentation, so it is relevant to conventional paper-and-pencil tests, computer based tests, and performance tests. It is not designed to cover employment testing, licensure or certification testing, or other types of testing outside the field of education. The ***Code*** is directed primarily at professionally developed tests used in formally administered testing programs. Although the ***Code*** is not intended to cover tests made by teachers for use in their own classrooms, teachers are encouraged to use the guidelines to help improve their testing practices.

The ***Code*** addresses the roles of test developers and test users separately. Test developers are people and organizations that construct tests, as well as those that set policies for testing programs. Test users are people and agencies that select tests, administer tests, commission test development services, or make decisions on the basis of test scores. Test developer and test user roles may overlap, for example, when a state or local education agency commissions test development services, sets policies that control the test development process, and makes decisions on the basis of the test scores.

Many of the statements in the ***Code*** refer to the selection and use of existing tests. When a new test is developed, when an existing test is modified, or when the administration of a test is modified, the ***Code*** is intended to provide guidance for this process.

*The **Code** is not intended to be mandatory, exhaustive, or definitive, and may not be applicable to every situation. Instead, the **Code** is intended to be aspirational, and is not intended to take precedence over the judgment of those who have competence in the subjects addressed.*

The *Code* provides guidance separately for test developers and test users in four critical areas:

A. Developing and Selecting Appropriate Tests
B. Administering and Scoring Tests
C. Reporting and Interpreting Test Results
D. Informing Test Takers

The ***Code*** is intended to be consistent with the relevant parts of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association [AERA], American Psychological Association [APA], and National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 1999). The ***Code*** is not meant to add new principles over and above those in the *Standards* or to change their meaning. Rather, the ***Code*** is intended to represent the spirit of selected portions of the *Standards* in a way that is relevant and meaningful to developers and users of tests, as well as to test takers and/or their parents or guardians. States, districts, schools, organizations and individual professionals are encouraged to commit themselves to fairness in testing and safeguarding the rights of test takers. The ***Code*** is intended to assist in carrying out such commitments.

The ***Code*** has been prepared by the Joint Committee on Testing Practices, a cooperative effort among several professional organizations. The aim of the Joint Committee is to act, in the public interest, to advance the quality of testing practices. Members of the Joint Committee include the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the National Association of Test Directors (NATD), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME).

A. Developing and Selecting Appropriate Tests

Test Developers	Test Users
Test developers should provide the information and supporting evidence that test users need to select appropriate tests.	Test users should select tests that meet the intended purpose and that are appropriate for the intended test takers.
A-1. Provide evidence of what the test measures, the recommended uses, the intended test takers, and the strengths and limitations of the test, including the level of precision of the test scores.	**A-1.** Define the purpose for testing, the content and skills to be tested, and the intended test takers. Select and use the most appropriate test based on a thorough review of available information.
A-2. Describe how the content and skills to be tested were selected and how the tests were developed.	**A-2.** Review and select tests based on the appropriateness of test content, skills tested, and content coverage for the intended purpose of testing.
A-3. Communicate information about a test's characteristics at a level of detail appropriate to the intended test users.	**A-3.** Review materials provided by test developers and select tests for which clear, accurate, and complete information is provided.
A-4. Provide guidance on the levels of skills, knowledge, and training necessary for appropriate review, selection, and administration of tests.	**A-4.** Select tests through a process that includes persons with appropriate knowledge, skills, and training.
A-5. Provide evidence that the technical quality, including reliability and validity, of the test meets its intended purposes.	**A-5.** Evaluate evidence of the technical quality of the test provided by the test developer and any independent reviewers.
A-6. Provide to qualified test users representative samples of test questions or practice tests, directions, answer sheets, manuals, and score reports.	**A-6.** Evaluate representative samples of test questions or practice tests, directions, answer sheets, manuals, and score reports before selecting a test.
A-7. Avoid potentially offensive content or language when developing test questions and related materials.	**A-7.** Evaluate procedures and materials used by test developers, as well as the resulting test, to ensure that potentially offensive content or language is avoided.
A-8. Make appropriately modified forms of tests or administration procedures available for test takers with disabilities who need special accommodations.	**A-8.** Select tests with appropriately modified forms or administration procedures for test takers with disabilities who need special accommodations.
A-9. Obtain and provide evidence on the performance of test takers of diverse subgroups, making significant efforts to obtain sample sizes that are adequate for subgroup analyses. Evaluate the evidence to ensure that differences in performance are related to the skills being assessed.	**A-9.** Evaluate the available evidence on the performance of test takers of diverse subgroups. Determine to the extent feasible which performance differences may have been caused by factors unrelated to the skills being assessed.

B. Administering and Scoring Tests

Test Developers	Test Users
Test developers should explain how to administer and score tests correctly and fairly.	Test users should administer and score tests correctly and fairly.
B-1. Provide clear descriptions of detailed procedures for administering tests in a standardized manner.	**B-1.** Follow established procedures for administering tests in a standardized manner.
B-2. Provide guidelines on reasonable procedures for assessing persons with disabilities who need special accommodations or those with diverse linguistic backgrounds.	**B-2.** Provide and document appropriate procedures for test takers with disabilities who need special accommodations or those with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Some accommodations may be required by law or regulation.
B-3. Provide information to test takers or test users on test question formats and procedures for answering test questions, including information on the use of any needed materials and equipment.	**B-3.** Provide test takers with an opportunity to become familiar with test question formats and any materials or equipment that may be used during testing.
B-4. Establish and implement procedures to ensure the security of testing materials during all phases of test development, administration, scoring, and reporting.	**B-4.** Protect the security of test materials, including respecting copyrights and eliminating opportunities for test takers to obtain scores by fraudulent means.
B-5. Provide procedures, materials and guidelines for scoring the tests, and for monitoring the accuracy of the scoring process. If scoring the test is the responsibility of the test developer, provide adequate training for scorers.	**B-5.** If test scoring is the responsibility of the test user, provide adequate training to scorers and ensure and monitor the accuracy of the scoring process.
B-6. Correct errors that affect the interpretation of the scores and communicate the corrected results promptly.	**B-6.** Correct errors that affect the interpretation of the scores and communicate the corrected results promptly.
B-7. Develop and implement procedures for ensuring the confidentiality of scores.	**B-7.** Develop and implement procedures for ensuring the confidentiality of scores.

C. Reporting and Interpreting Test Results

Test Developers	Test Users
Test developers should report test results accurately and provide information to help test users interpret test results correctly.	Test users should report and interpret test results accurately and clearly.
C-1. Provide information to support recommended interpretations of the results, including the nature of the content, norms or comparison groups, and other technical evidence. Advise test users of the benefits and limitations of test results and their interpretation. Warn against assigning greater precision than is warranted.	**C-1.** Interpret the meaning of the test results, taking into account the nature of the content, norms or comparison groups, other technical evidence, and benefits and limitations of test results.
C-2. Provide guidance regarding the interpretations of results for tests administered with modifications. Inform test users of potential problems in interpreting test results when tests or test administration procedures are modified.	**C-2.** Interpret test results from modified test or test administration procedures in view of the impact those modifications may have had on test results.
C-3. Specify appropriate uses of test results and warn test users of potential misuses.	**C-3.** Avoid using tests for purposes other than those recommended by the test developer unless there is evidence to support the intended use or interpretation.
C-4. When test developers set standards, provide the rationale, procedures, and evidence for setting performance standards or passing scores. Avoid using stigmatizing labels.	**C-4.** Review the procedures for setting performance standards or passing scores. Avoid using stigmatizing labels.
C-5. Encourage test users to base decisions about test takers on multiple sources of appropriate information, not on a single test score.	**C-5.** Avoid using a single test score as the sole determinant of decisions about test takers. Interpret test scores in conjunction with other information about individuals.
C-6. Provide information to enable test users to accurately interpret and report test results for groups of test takers, including information about who were and who were not included in the different groups being compared, and information about factors that might influence the interpretation of results.	**C-6.** State the intended interpretation and use of test results for groups of test takers. Avoid grouping test results for purposes not specifically recommended by the test developer unless evidence is obtained to support the intended use. Report procedures that were followed in determining who were and who were not included in the groups being compared and describe factors that might influence the interpretation of results.
C-7. Provide test results in a timely fashion and in a manner that is understood by the test taker.	**C-7.** Communicate test results in a timely fashion and in a manner that is understood by the test taker.
C-8. Provide guidance to test users about how to monitor the extent to which the test is fulfilling its intended purposes.	**C-8.** Develop and implement procedures for monitoring test use, including consistency with the intended purposes of the test.

D. Informing Test Takers

Under some circumstances, test developers have direct communication with the test takers and/or control of the tests, testing process, and test results. In other circumstances the test users have these responsibilities.

Test developers or test users should inform test takers about the nature of the test, test taker rights and responsibilities, the appropriate use of scores, and procedures for resolving challenges to scores.
D-1. Inform test takers in advance of the test administration about the coverage of the test, the types of question formats, the directions, and appropriate test-taking strategies. Make such information available to all test takers.
D-2. When a test is optional, provide test takers or their parents/guardians with information to help them judge whether a test should be taken—including indications of any consequences that may result from not taking the test (e.g., not being eligible to compete for a particular scholarship)—and whether there is an available alternative to the test.
D-3. Provide test takers or their parents and guardians with information about rights test takers may have to obtain copies of tests and completed answer sheets, to retake tests, to have tests re-scored, or to have scores declared invalid.
D-4. Provide test takers or their parents and guardians with information about responsibilities test takers have, such as being aware of the intended purpose and uses of the test, performing at capacity, following directions, and not disclosing test items or interfering with other test takers.
D-5. Inform test takers or their parents and guardians how long scores will be kept on file and indicate to whom, under what circumstances, and in what manner test scores and related information will or will not be released. Protect test scores from unauthorized release and access.
D-6. Describe procedures for investigating and resolving circumstances that might result in cancelling or withholding scores, such as failure to adhere to specified testing procedures.
D-7. Describe procedures that test takers, parents and guardians, and other interested parties may use to obtain more information about the test, register complaints, and have problems resolved.

Note: The membership of the Working Group that developed the *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* and of the Joint Committee on Testing Practices that guided the Working Group is as follows:

Peter Behuniak, PhD
Lloyd Bond, PhD
Gwyneth M. Boodoo, PhD
Wayne Camara, PhD
Ray Fenton, PhD
John J. Fremer, PhD (Co-Chair)
Sharon M. Goldsmith, PhD
Bert F. Green, PhD
William G. Harris, PhD
Stephanie H. McConaughy, PhD
Julie P. Noble, PhD
Wayne M. Patience, PhD
Carole L. Perlman, PhD
Douglas K. Smith, PhD (deceased)
Janet E. Wall, EdD (Co-Chair)
Pat Nellor Wickwire, PhD
Mary Yakimowski, PhD
Janet E. Helms, PhD
Lara Frumkin, PhD, of the APA served as staff liaison.

The Joint Committee intends that the ***Code*** be consistent with and supportive of existing codes of conduct and standards of other professional groups who use tests in educational contexts. Of particular note are the *Responsibilities of Users of Standardized Tests* (Association for Assessment in Counseling, 1989), *APA Test User Qualifications* (2000), *ASHA Code of Ethics* (2001), *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (1992), *NASP Professional Conduct Manual* (2000), *NCME Code of Professional Responsibility* (1995), and *Rights and Responsibilities of Test Takers: Guidelines and Expectations* (Joint Committee on Testing Practices, 2000).

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